Sprucing up downtown

Board likes idea of murals

A proposal from La Academia Del Arte to paint colorful murals on the rear of downtown buildings got an initial okay this morning from the Central Business Improvement District (CBID) advisory board.

A representative of the organization, which promotes the art of minority groups, Ralph D'Oliveira, told members of the board that his group is going to apply for a grant from the California Arts Commission. He added that he would like to see a matching grant from CBID.

The board agreed unanimously to approve the proposal "in concept" until the group comes back with more details.

Chairman Roger Hoffman said he wanted to make sure the CBID could afford to match the state grant.

"I'm afraid you might come up with a figure of $8,000," Hoffman said. "We just don't have that kind of money.

D'Oliveira estimated that the figure "would probably be around $2,000."

Most enthusiastic about the idea was Dennis Matthews, owner of Genpak Mall and the Plantation, who said he thought the murals would bring in more tourists. He suggested that guided tours of the murals could be organized.

Henry Henrichsen, owner of John's Shoe Store, was concerned that many of the building exteriors might be in such poor shape that it would be a waste of time and money to paint murals on them.

D'Oliveira, however, said he and other members of his group have checked out several exteriors and "they're all in good enough condition to paint on."

Also brought up was the question of whether the murals would need the approval of the planning commission and city council.

Matthews noted that a recent decision by city attorney Don Haile made it clear that such murals wouldn't be in violation of the city sign ordinance. (Haile ruled two months ago that the mural on the Mona Lisa Cafe was legal since it wasn't advertising.)

"And," Matthews added, "The city as of now has no ordinance controlling color."

La Academia Del Arte presently has three murals on buildings in the city. Besides the cafe mural, there is a mural being painted on the Radcliff School on Rodriguez St., and a mural on the senior citizens center on East Beach St. A mural dedication party will be held at the center this Friday at 1 p.m.